



Nebraska

State Rehabilitation Council

*"A consumer-controlled council
committed to ensuring quality
rehabilitation services."*

*Annual Report
1999-2000*

December, 2000

*Nebraska State Board of Education
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 68509*

To the Citizens of the State of Nebraska:

The Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is pleased to present to you the year 2000 Annual Report.

We continue to work closely with Vocational Rehabilitation to improve and expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Nebraska. One focus is adapting to changes from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. How do we cooperate fully with our WIA partners yet adhere to our mandate to provide quality employment services to only those qualifying through our order of selection, as we move to the one-stop service centers? We continue to be concerned with those consumers in Nebraska's vast rural area and are determined to safeguard and improve outcomes for this population under the one-stop center concept. This past year, the SRC presented their concerns to Voc Rehab about the WIA One-Stop Centers regarding client confidentiality, appeal processes, order of selection and differences in performance standards and measures.

The SRC requested that all Voc Rehab Office Directors encourage local business owners with disabilities to apply for membership on their local Workforce Investment Boards. The SRC closely monitored the new team concept that Voc Rehab is using to review Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) and requested that Voc Rehab allow the client to meet with the entire team if he or she has any concerns that would stop or delay plan approval. The SRC helped formulate changes to the agency's post-secondary training and financial participation policies and supported the resulting policy changes.

This past year we also monitored and provided input into the new Front End Process that Voc Rehab is using to improve consumer choice and facilitate more appropriate and effective IPEs. The SRC also discussed with Voc Rehab issues in the areas of self-employment, employment warranties, a career planning guide and reviewed changes in how Voc Rehab pays vendors and the match requirements for agreements that the agency participates in.

A highlight of the past year was meeting with RSA Commissioner Fredric Schroeder. He helped us define SRC's role and answered many questions about the WIA.

In partnership with Voc Rehab, the SRC developed and reviewed the state goals and assisted in preparing the State Plan. In the coming year, we will continue to work together to develop and review the state goals and assist in preparing the State Plan. Working together, we can improve the quality of life and economic security of people with disabilities in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

Sharon Bloechle

Sharon Bloechle, Chairperson

Overall function of State Rehab Council

Review, analyze, and advise Vocational Rehabilitation regarding their performance, including responsibilities relating to:

- ✓ eligibility (including order of selection);
- ✓ the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services provided; and
- ✓ functions performed by State agencies that affect or potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes.

In partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation, develop, agree to, and review State goals and priorities, and evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program.

Assist in the preparation of the State plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations.

To the extent feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with:

- ✓ functions performed by Voc Rehab;
- ✓ vocational rehabilitation services provided by state agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities; and
- ✓ employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.

Prepare and submit an annual report to the State Department of Education on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the state, and make the report available to the public.

To avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served, coordinate activities with the activities of other councils within the state.

Provide for the coordination and the establishment of working relationships between Vocational Rehabilitation and the Statewide Independent Living Council and Centers for Independent Living within the State.

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Prior Year Accomplishments - Future Directions

Vocational Rehabilitation continues its commitment to Quality Employment Solutions® by obtaining better jobs with a living wage, health care benefits and good career opportunities for people who experience a significant disability. We do this by: (1) Partnering with schools and engaging parents in promoting early career planning for students with disabilities, (2) Structuring and documenting essential vocational rehabilitation services using a best practice approach to assure high quality and continuous improvement, (3) Developing and implementing processes that maximize staff time and foster greater effectiveness and efficiency, (4) Establishing long-term partnerships with businesses that provide better jobs, benefits and career opportunities, and (5) Providing a warranty that proactively promotes job stability and career advancement.

Significant progress has been made in support of this strategy. Future directions hold good promise.

Nebraska Workforce Development Vocational Rehabilitation is represented on the Nebraska Workforce Investment

Accomplishments continued

Board as well as the Greater Omaha, Greater Lincoln and Greater Nebraska boards. Local Vocational Rehabilitation staff are preparing Memos of Understanding with local One-Stop Center staff and developing critical referral and service delivery processes. This initiative will assure that people who experience a significant disability will be effectively served with the core services available to all Nebraskan's at the one-stop centers and the specialized services provided by Vocational Rehabilitation. Key Voc Rehab field staff have participated in statewide Workforce Development training and will help assure that important linkages are maintained between the one-stop centers and the local Voc Rehab service delivery system.

Business Partnerships For several years, the State of Nebraska Treasurers office has provided on-the-job training for Vocational Rehabilitation consumers. The program has been expanded to include skill training in customer service and financial aspects of the banking business. Vocational Rehabilitation staff will share the training responsibility with the Treasurers office. Local banks, such as Lincoln Federal Savings and Loan and Wells Fargo will be working with Voc Rehab staff to help graduates of this training program find employment in the banking industry. First National Bank of Omaha and Vocational Rehabilitation staff will be setting up a similar program for Voc Rehab consumers in the Omaha area. Careers in the banking industry hold exciting possibilities for people who experience a disability.

In an effort to expand good career opportunities for transition students, Vocational Rehabilitation staff are working with the Lincoln Home Builders Association and the Central Nebraska Home Builders Association to set up building industries training programs. Other business partnerships

have been set up with SunMart, Walgreen, and Pamida to hire qualified transition students.

Home based employment provides exciting opportunities for people with significant disabilities. However, there has been a problem in finding the type of home employment where the consumer can make a living wage. This is why Vocational Rehabilitation is working with CI Direct, an inbound telephone insurance brokerage company, and MedQuest, a medical transcription company. Both companies are ready to work with Vocational Rehabilitation to pilot this innovative home based employment which will offer specialized training, employment with a living wage, and good career opportunities. Vocational Rehabilitation staff will provide the assistive technology and other rehabilitation services needed to assure the success of these programs.

The Elks of Nebraska continue to be a good source of business contacts through local breakfast and luncheon business meetings that they provide for Vocational Rehabilitation. This gives us an opportunity to recognize local businesses that hire people with a disability and invite other business leaders to hear about the good source of employees available through the partnership with Voc Rehab and the Elks of Nebraska.

Vocational Rehabilitation staff will continue to develop other productive partnerships with the business community while maintaining existing partnerships — some of which include Marriott, Target, Wal-Mart, Pentagon Federal Credit Union, Affiliated Foods, Nebraska Machine Products, Offutt Air Force Base, First Data Resources, and InfoUSA.

Customer Focus Vocational Rehabilitation has valued the input from consumers through our traditional Satisfaction

Accomplishments continued

Survey, focus groups through the Client Assistance Program and the statewide Joint Agency Meetings (JAM). Future plans include a revamp of the current Satisfaction Survey and The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The Client Assistance Program is arranging for three focus groups to provide critical consumer input on the IPE process and document. The State Rehab Council will help improve the Voc Rehab client satisfaction system to assure that it provides local, in-process feedback from consumers. The information from the revised satisfaction system should provide greater guidance from consumers to effect continuing improvements in the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Employment Services Major progress was made last year in defining and structuring Vocational Rehabilitation services. The intent has been to standardize Voc Rehab services using a best practice method and document the approach, which will facilitate continuous improvement in the quality of Voc Rehab services.

As each service module is developed and used in the field, a committee will periodically evaluate the approach with input from consumers, staff and results achieved. The service delivery modules included: (1) Orientation to Vocational Rehabilitation — an approach designed to help consumers make an informed choice about participating in the Voc Rehab program. This module helps establish a positive partnership between Voc Rehab and the consumer early on. (2) Benefits Analysis counseling — provided by Voc Rehab staff with specialized training in Social Security disability work incentives. The service helps consumers make an informed choice whether or not going to work is a good business decision. (3) Career Planning Guide — provides extensive resources to help consumers make an informed

choice about selecting a career. (4) Employment Success Skills — provides resources to help clients maintain and advance in employment. (5) Job Seeking Skills — provides resources to help a consumer who has a job goal search for, interview and land the right job.

Future service areas to be developed include Job Analysis and Community Based Assessment services. Additionally, staff will explore ways to deliver more Voc Rehab services in groups to maximize the delivery of services, while providing consumers an opportunity for peer support and dialogue.

Specialized Services Solutions on Site is a partnership between Vocational Rehabilitation, Elks of Nebraska and the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership. This program adapts assistive technology solutions to the job site. Consumers receiving this service increased 22% this past year from 186 to 236 people served. Continued training will be provided for Vocational Rehabilitation staff to assure that all consumers receive assistive technology services as needed.

Self-Employment services were greatly enhanced during the past year. Vocational Rehabilitation contracted with several business consultants to help consumers determine the viability of their self-employment idea, help them develop a workable business plan, and obtain funding. This program will help a consumer succeed when they have a good business idea while reducing the likelihood of entering into an unworkable business venture.

School Partnerships Vocational Rehabilitation continues its strong commitment to students with disabilities, age 14 through 21, who are transitioning from school to work and adult life. During the past year, staff were involved in a series of dialogue groups to prepare a best practice docu-

Accomplishments continued

ment for the Transition Partnership Initiative. The document more clearly defines Voc Rehab's role as a key partner in planning and providing transition services for students with disabilities. Local staff will receive training on this document to assure greater consistency of service and strengthen the partnership between local schools, students and parents.

Special transition projects were continued and strengthened through: (1) the SCOPE program with Lincoln Public Schools, focusing on students with learning disabilities and behavior disabilities, (2) the Co-op For Success program with Children's Mental Health and Grand Island Public Schools, focusing on students with mental health disabilities using a "wraparound" mental health philosophy, (3) the SALT project with schools in Dawson and surrounding counties, serving all students with disabilities, and (4) a collaboration of school districts in northeast Nebraska through ESU #1, serving all students with disabilities. In addition, Voc Rehab staff will continue to work with all school districts to provide transition services and facilitate career planning for students with disabilities.

Staff Training During the past year, a series of training opportunities which cover the rehabilitation process and operational supports, were developed and provided for staff. Initially offered to all staff, the training modules are now scheduled sequentially a year in advance so all new staff can attend each program in a timely manner. The training includes: (1) Medical Aspects of disability I & II — covering 13 major disability groups and emphasizing the vocational implication of the disability, (2) Vocational Rehabilitation Processes — covering major processes such as eligibility, order of selection, and Individual Plan for Employment, (3) Vocational Rehabilitation Services — provides an overview

of the 17 direct services provided by the 14 Voc Rehab employment teams, (4) Computer Basics — covering basic computer operations and other Voc Rehab support systems, and (5) QUEST — the Vocational Rehabilitation integrated consumer information and support system.

Additionally, an individualized training plan is set up for all new employees that includes the above training as well as one-on-one training with local staff and state office program staff.

A new training program developed for this year is Managing Group Services, which provides practical help on conducting and managing Vocational Rehabilitation services in a group setting.

Employment Warranty Vocational Rehabilitation continues its commitment to consumers for better jobs and career advancement through the Employment Warranty program. This past year, Vocational Rehabilitation staff held statewide dialogue groups and developed a position paper to guide the implementation of this program. The document helps to define services Voc Rehab offers during the warranty, as well as the practices needed to assure that Vocational Rehabilitation staff are proactive in helping consumers plan for career advancement.

State Rehabilitation Council Committee Reports

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee continued to ensure direct involvement of the SRC in developing the State Plan goals and objectives by having Voc Rehab present a specific topic related to goals and priorities at each SRC meeting for discussion and recommendations, encouraging SRC members to participate on agency committees to explore current and future policy, appointing a member to represent the SRC at all Joint Agency Meetings held across the state to elicit public comment on services, receiving progress reports on the Parent Training Center grant activities, along with assistive technology, and other Voc Rehab projects.

The Committee also:

- Helped Voc Rehab interview new hearing officers;
- Sent letters of recommendation on the appointment of three SRC members to state and local Workforce Investment Boards;
- Joined with the Statewide Independent Living Council to arrange a meeting with RSA Commissioner Fredric Schroeder;
- Sought out and interviewed new members for the SRC, trying to make sure that different disability areas were represented; and
- Worked with Voc Rehab to provide training for new members of the SRC.

The Executive Committee continued to work on facilitating more efficient SRC committee meetings by trying different meeting times, agendas and locations etc.. We hosted a half-

day training session for SRC members with Dave Adams, Director of RCEP at Southern Illinois University, and were pleased to hear that we are functioning extremely well. We continue to survey our members at the end of the year about the mission and activities of the SRC and try to implement any suggestions that are offered.

This next year will likely again be dominated by changes that will come about in the state as a result of the Workforce Investment Act. This committee and the SRC as a whole will be busy trying to guarantee all Nebraskans with disabilities receive quality employment services.

Public Policy/Legislative

A number of legislative and policy issues maintained the attention of the Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council's Public Policy /Legislative Committee in fiscal year 1999/ 2000. Legislative items included revisiting the previous year's efforts as well as support for new bills before the Unicameral. Public policy concerns continued to focus on the effects of the Workforce Investment Act on the identity and function of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The committee discussed the need for ongoing contact with the legislature, and developed a list identifying the state senator for each council member. Council members were encouraged to write their state senator and inform them of their membership on the SRC, the purpose of the council, and that the council is available as a resource. The committee intends to find additional ways of providing information to the legislature that Voc Rehab serves people with all disabili-

Committee Reports continued

ties interested in employment. The committee will target senators with an interest in disabilities.

The committee monitored the progress of several pieces of legislation including **LB 1300/LB 1151** (an upgrade to the present Medicaid Buy-In program expanded by the Work Incentives Improvement Act), **LB 1408** (a demonstration project allowing 1000 Nebraskans with early stage disabling conditions to become Medicaid eligible while maintaining their employment), and **LR 351** (a study resolution examining possible beneficial changes to the current model for providing personal assistance services and expansion of new Centers for Independent Living in Nebraska).

The committee discussed the benefits of identifying a sub-committee that would be available to review legislation more quickly and in detail for bills that come up between SRC meetings. They will continue to consider this method of operation in the upcoming legislative session.

Interagency Outreach Committee

The Interagency Outreach Committee developed the following four goals for the 1999/2000 year:

1) Improving Communication with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) - the committee believes that communication between the Statewide Independent Living Council and the SRC is important and that a report from the SILC is necessary at every SRC meeting. A new representative from the SILC was appointed in October and communication between the councils improved. A joint meeting between the SRC and the SILC was held in May to facilitate communication and collaborate on issues of concern to both councils.

2) Maintain Communication with other Councils – the committee maintained contact with councils identified in the rehabilitation act and kept the SRC informed of their activities. Updated information from the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) was presented and included a report on the Transition Committee's activities regarding graduation issues for students with disabilities.

3) Keep the SRC Informed of Workforce Investment Activities – The committee continued to monitor activities going on with the Workforce Investment Act, and invited the Voc Rehab liaison to each meeting to provide an update. Representatives from the three different Workforce Investment Areas (Lincoln, Omaha, and Greater NE) were also invited to a meeting to update the council about workforce investment activities in their area.

4) Establishing Contact with Other Organizations – in an effort to learn more about other organizations and how they impact Voc Rehab, representatives were invited to the SRC meetings to report on their activities. This included representatives from Nebraska Advocacy Services. Written reports were substituted for written reports during some meetings.

Goals for Next Year

The Interagency Outreach Committee's main goal for the next year will be to gather as much information as possible regarding WIA activities across the state. The committee will request information from Voc Rehab staff assigned to WIA committees, as well as continue to receive updates from the Voc Rehab director, Voc Rehab liaison, and other council members who are involved in WIA activities. The committee believes it is important for the council to be aware of WIA activities and how they may impact Voc Rehab and indi-

Committee Reports continued

viduals with disabilities looking for employment. Representatives from other organizations will continue to be invited to present at SRC meetings as appropriate.

Client Service Delivery Committee

The Client Services Committee set the following goals for the year: 1) review procedures for closing difficult cases; 2) review the process for reassigning staff when a consumer is unsatisfied and make recommendations to define procedures; 3) explore the relationship between the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Voc Rehab; 4) review the statistics on different disabilities to determine if services are affected by funding or because specific populations are more difficult to work with.

In addressing the first two goals, the committee reviewed procedures used in closing cases and/or reassigning staff to consumers who were dissatisfied with their counselors. Since Voc Rehab is now using the team process, both of these situations may be alleviated or improved. The committee invited Voc Rehab staff members to their meetings to provide information on how the team process is working and how client participation/client control fits into this concept. The Voc Rehab representatives provided information on how plans are presented to their teams, how they are reviewed, and how it is working in the different offices.

The committee members discussed consumer rights regarding their Voc Rehab plan after a team has reviewed it. A recommendation was made by the SRC that when teams meet to go over the consumer's individual employment plan and a decision regarding the plan is made by the team, the consumer have the opportunity to meet with the team before

any decision is made final.

In addressing the relationship between the WIA and Voc Rehab, the committee reviewed three questions that Workforce Development will use to measure consumer satisfaction. After examining how those questions could be used on Voc Rehab's consumer satisfaction cards, the committee suggested the following changes: Add two yes or no questions: #1 "Would you refer others to Voc Rehab?" and #2 "Would you be likely to use Voc Rehab again?"; Replace "What else would you like?" with "Overall, how satisfied were you with Voc Rehab services?" This question would have a scale for responding, and then "Comment" would be added for them to respond further.

The committee decided to focus on the following goals for the next year: 1) Examine specific issues regarding changes that have been implemented in Voc Rehab consumer services (e.g. front-end process, new computer system, relationship with Workforce Development, transitional process, etc.). The committee intends to accomplish this by inviting Voc Rehab staff from various offices throughout the state to committee meetings to provide feedback on how these changes are actually working to improve services; and 2) Exploring a better way to conduct consumer satisfaction surveys (e.g. getting feedback from Voc Rehab staff, considering phone surveys, utilizing students to facilitate the surveys as a class assigned project).

Statistics

6,690

Nebraskans with disabilities received
vocational rehabilitation services

2,895

Nebraskans with disabilities applied for services

1,564

New Individual Plans for Employment

3,374

Nebraskans with disabilities
implemented employment plans

1,121

Nebraskans with disabilities
entered gainful employment

Nebraska State Rehabilitation Council Members 1999/2000

Pamela Berger
Omaha
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Sharon Bloechle
Omaha
Term Expires: Sept. 2001

Rodney Breckner
Hastings
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Lind Carey
Norfolk
Term Expires: Sept. 2001

Eileen Curry
Lincoln
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Michelle Davis
Hastings
Term Expires: Sept. 2001

Alvin Fox
McCool Junction
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Susan Gieschen
Ogallala
Term Expires: Sept. 2002

Kay Grone
Central City
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Theresa Hodges
Omaha
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Debra Holcomb
Lincoln
Term Expires: Dec. 2002

Dave Jelinek
Grand Island
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

Tim Kolb
Franklin
Term Expires: Sept. 2002

Kris Nolan Brown
Grand Island
Term Expires: Sept. 2001

Judy Ortmeier
Lincoln
Term Expires: Sept. 2002

Vicki Rasmussen
Lincoln
Term Expires: On-going

Jack Shepard
Hastings
Term Expires: Sept. 2001

Carla Sorensen
Lincoln
Term Expires: Sept. 2003

*Frank Lloyd
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Term Expires: On-going

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